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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the preferences of parents, teachers, and students regarding the relative benefits of a cooperative teaching (general educator/special educator in a general education classroom) service model in comparison to a special education "pull-out" model. A cooperative teaching model was implemented in four public secondary schools, during the 1989-90 school year, in Anne Arundel County (Maryland). A questionnaire was administered to special education students (N=97), parents (N=26), pairs of co-teachers (N=21), and building administrators (N=3) comparing the co-teaching experience with the previous year's special education classroom placement. Results indicated that participants preferred a co-taught service delivery model over a "pull-out" model. Special education students enjoyed school more, learned more, and felt better about themselves in the co-taught general education classroom. The survey found no negative impact indicated by the co-taught special education student in terms of experiencing less time to finish school work, fear in asking questions, or additional behavior problems in the general education classroom. (Includes 18 references) (JDD)

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Student, Teacher, and Parent
Preference for Less Restrictive Special Education
Models - Cooperative Teaching

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Abstract

In light of concerns regarding the ability of the general education classroom to respond to the learning needs of mainstreamed handicapped students, cooperative teaching (general educator/special educator in a general education classroom) is suggested as an effective service delivery model to be considered. Survey research results document student, teacher and parent preference for co-taught classes over separate special education class instruction. Results indicate that special education students enjoy school more, learn more and feel better about themselves when they receive special education instruction in a co-taught general education classroom rather than in a separate special education class.

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (69th, Atlanta, GA, April 1-5, 1991).

Student, Teacher, and Parent, Preference for Less Restrictive
Special Education Models - Cooperative Teaching

Concerns regarding the ability of general education to effectively respond to the learning needs of large numbers of handicapped students integrated into general education classrooms under least restrictive environment initiatives have been heard frequently in the post-regular education initiative literature (Davis, 1989; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Keough, 1988; Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell, 1989; Schumaker & Deshler, 1988; Zigmond & Baker, 1990). Indeed, it has been said that "few advocates have examined the basic assumption of full time mainstreaming- that the regular education classroom can provide an environment that facilitates learning for a wide range of students" (Baker & Zigmond, 1990, p. 515). It has also been pointed out that scarce research exists in support of the less restrictive special education service delivery models proposed to replace special education "pull-out" classes (West & Idol, 1987).

The most frequently proposed special education alternative to pull-out programs has been the consultation model in which the general education teacher receives consultative assistance from a special educator regarding the learning needs of handicapped students placed in a general education classroom for instruction (Idol & West, 1987). It has been suggested however, that fundamental changes are needed in a general education setting currently oriented more toward conformity and routines than accommodation and individualization in order to truly benefit from consultation services (Baker & Zigmond, 1990).

A service delivery model which appears to respond to the expressed concerns regarding the ability of the general education classroom to address the individual learning needs of handicapped students is cooperative teaching. Cooperative teaching (or co-teaching) "refers to an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings (i.e., general classrooms)" (Bauwens, Hourcade,

& Friend, 1989, p. 18). As an outgrowth of the consultation model, co-teaching provides for collaborative assistance to the general educator in adapting and modifying instruction for the mainstreamed special education student but also includes the special educator in the implementation plan.

The advantages of cooperative teaching in directly supporting both handicapped and non-handicapped low achieving students in the general education classroom as well as in providing a mutually beneficial professional collaboration system for general and special educators have been well described by Bauwens, Hourcade and Friend (1989). Also described by the authors are teacher survey results indicating perceived teacher benefits from co-teaching in areas of increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, enhanced stability, as well as increased teaching/learning potential. Results of related research document the academic viability, enhanced and less stigmatizing social effects, and overall parental satisfaction with an integrated general classroom model when compared to a special education "pull-out" model (Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Lowenbaun, 1988; Lowenbraun, Madge, & Affleck, 1990; Madge, Affleck, & Lowenbraun, 1990).

Further research suggesting that integrated service models such as cooperative teaching are particularly responsive to concerns regarding the instructional range and flexibility of the general classroom have appeared in the special education literature (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989; Wang & Birch, 1984a; Wang & Birch, 1984b). Most recently, in a comparison of three different special education service models (resource room, consultation service, and consultation combined with direct instruction in the regular classroom), students receiving the combination of consultative services and direct instruction by a special educator in a general classroom made greater overall academic gains (Schulte, Osborne, & McKinney, 1990). The present article will describe survey results summarizing the preferences of

parents, teachers, and students regarding the relative benefits of a cooperative teaching service model in comparison to a special education "pull-out" model.

Method

During the 1989-90 school year, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools of Maryland implemented a cooperative teaching model in four of its thirty secondary schools. Prior to this time, all secondary schools provided special education services using a special education classroom model with students pulled out of regular classrooms for content instruction. For the four cooperative teaching schools involved in this pilot program (three high schools, one middle school), cooperative teaching provided a sharp contrast with the way special education services had historically been offered. Parents, students, special educators and general educators involved in this project were provided an opportunity to compare a model of service delivery which returned special education students to general education classrooms for instruction through a collaborative, integrated co-teaching initiative with a long standing segregated "pull-out" experience within the Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

Prior to the start of the 1989-90 school year, teams of general and special educator teachers from each of the pilot schools were brought together for two days of inservice on the rationale, goals and process of collaborative planning and teaching. Schools and teachers were involved on a voluntary basis and in each case, the strong support of the building administrator was secured prior to training. An essential focus of the inservice training was to provide participants with a clear understanding of the potential value of co-teaching as a less restrictive alternative for special education students but also to point out the possible benefits to all students in having a special educator sharing the instructional responsibilities.

Particularly stressed in the inservice training was the unique opportunity provided by cooperative teaching in combining in one classroom the skills of the general educator in content preparation, curriculum sequencing, and large group instruction with the special educator skills in individualization, applied behavior analysis, and a broad range of adaptive learning and teaching strategies (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1988). The added benefit of cooperative teaching as an ongoing professional sharing and growth experience for the teachers involved became apparent as teachers began to co-plan their first instructional units.

A survey was conducted in the spring of the 1989-90 school year which asked co-teachers, special education parents, and special education students to compare their co-teaching experience in the general classroom during the 1989-90 school year with the previous year's special education classroom placement. Questionnaire statements reflecting attitude toward school, academic and social involvement in school, and student self esteem were posed for respondents to express their level of agreement on a five-point scale (5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= don't know, 2= disagree, 1= strongly disagree).

All special education students ($n = 97$), pairs of co-teachers ($n = 21$), and three building administrators ($n = 3$) involved in the pilot project completed the questionnaire within the school setting in May, 1990. Parents of twenty-six special education students ($n = 26$) returned questionnaires sent home with students representing a 27% response rate for parents. A total of 147 questionnaires ($n = 147$) were included in the survey results. In addition to responding to the statements on the questionnaire, co-teachers were also asked to list advantages and disadvantages of cooperative teaching as an open-ended question.

Results

Responses to questionnaire statements have been organized to reflect student, teacher and parent service delivery preference when considering students attitudes toward school, academic involvement in school, and social outcomes. Possible indicators of negative effects from general classroom based services were also considered as a category of responses. The small representation of administrator respondents ($n = 3$) was not included in overall survey results. In addition, survey response data illustrated in Tables 1 through 4 have been reduced to agreement responses (strongly agree, agree) and disagreement responses (disagree, strongly disagree) for purposes of analysis. Neutral responses (don't know) are not included in the analysis.

Table 1 shows strong student, teacher and parent preferences for a co-taught service delivery model in comparison to a special education class model in terms of attitude toward school factors. The high level of agreement among all respondents that special education students enjoy going to school more (89.3%), are happier (81.9%), and like school better (77.6%) in co-taught classes than in separate special education class settings was significantly greater than disagreement responses ($\chi^2=69.143$, $p<.001$; $\chi^2 = 47.207$, $p<.001$; $\chi^2 = 35.533$, $p<.001$). Moreover, chi-square analyses also indicated no significant differences between groups in response to these statements ($\chi^2=.9760$, $\chi^2=3.3819$, $\chi^2 = 3.4931$).

Using indicators of academic involvement to compare preferences for co-teaching classes with special education classes (Table 2), students, teachers and parents expressed significant levels of agreement that special education students try harder in co-taught classes

(74.6%), learn more in co-taught classes (76.7%), and receive more homework (64.2%) and school work (67.6%) in this setting ($\chi^2 = 29.508, p < .001$; $\chi^2 = 34.133, p < .001$; $\chi^2 = 8.817, p < .001$; $\chi^2 = 13.703, p < .001$). As with the attitude toward school statements, there were no significant differences between students, teacher, and parent groups in responding to the academic involvement statements represented in Table 2 ($\chi^2 = .2382, \chi^2 = 3.4888, \chi^2 = .3010, \chi^2 = 3.0064$).

Questionnaire responses to social outcome statements indicate strong support for the long standing belief regarding the positive social effects of supported mainstreaming for special education students (Table 3). Significant levels of overall agreement (84.6%, $\chi^2 = 58.740, p < .001$) of students (85.4%), teachers (94.4%), and parents (73.9%) were found with the statement that special education students feel better about themselves in co-taught general education classrooms than in special education classrooms. Moreover, students (74.6%), teachers (88.9%), and parents (65%) asserted that the special education students have more school friends when taught in co-teaching classrooms. The level of agreement regarding this statement was significant ($\chi^2 = 23.040, p < .001$) and there was no significant disagreement between groups on either social outcome statements ($\chi^2 = 3.3834, \chi^2 = 1.8944$).

Concerns regarding possible negative effects of instructing special education students in the less restrictive setting of the general classroom were also investigated by the survey. Special education students, parents and teachers were asked to respond to statements questioning whether placement in the co-taught general class resulted in less time to finish class work, fear in asking questions, or more behavioral problems than in the special education class. The results (Table 4) indicate the absence of any significant negative effects in the areas questioned.

With regard to the concern that special education students in co-taught general classrooms would have less time to finish classwork, the majority of parents (55%) and students (54.7%) disagree while teachers (64%) tended to agree. However, the difference between the overall agreement (48.2%) and disagreement (51.8%) on this question was not significant ($X^2=0.1430$). Likewise, support was not found for the concern that special education students would be more afraid to ask questions in the co-taught general classroom than in a special classroom. In fact, students, teachers and parents as a group (66.7%, $X^2 = 12.667$; $p<.001$) disagreed strongly with this contention as they did (67.3%, $X^2=12.129$; $p<.001$) with the suggestion that special education students get into more trouble in the general classroom than in the special education class.

In addition to agreement responses to questionnaire statements, co-teachers were asked to comment in an open ended fashion on advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching. These comments, summarized in Tables 5 and 6, reinforce questionnaire statement findings regarding the benefits of co-teaching to the academic and social development of handicapped students, but also point out the advantages of co-teaching to all students and to the teachers themselves. The reporting of enhanced creativity, increased teaching strategies, and improved teacher supervision and responsiveness to students was noteworthy as were additional teacher comments regarding the improved learning and behavioral outcomes of all students in co-taught classes. The disadvantages of co-teaching as reported by teachers include additional planning time, larger classrooms and possible incompatibility of co-teachers as well as concerns regarding the appropriateness of co-teaching for all special education students.

Discussion

Results from this survey indicate that special education students, parents and cooperative teachers who participated in a co-teaching initiative during the 1989-90 school year prefer a co-taught service delivery model over a special education "pullout" class model. In fact, they agree that special education students enjoy school more, learn more, and feel better about themselves when they receive special education in a co-taught general education classroom than in a separate special education class. Moreover, the survey found no negative impact indicated by the co-taught special education student in terms of experiencing less time to finish school work, fear in asking questions or additional behavioral problems in the general education classroom.

Open-ended questioning of teachers involved in cooperative teaching over the 1989-90 school year provided a broad range of advantages identified with cooperative teaching which resulted in benefits to both handicapped and non-handicapped students as well as to the general and special education teachers involved. In fact, what began as an attempt to broaden the continuum of special education services within the Anne Arundel County Public Schools to include less restrictive special education alternatives for mildly handicapped students developed into an effective means to meet broader school improvement goals of the school system. That is, as a successful model for expanding the ability of the general education classroom to accommodate the learning needs of a wide range of students, cooperative teaching has been recommended as a successful tool in the untracking of academic instruction system wide.

In addition to supporting the implementation of more heterogeneous classroom instruction efforts, cooperative teaching has also been identified as a valuable and efficient means to inservice teachers and intensify instruction as a part of a strategic planning process.

Specifically, co-teaching has been used as a "trainer of trainers" inservice which can result in the effective transfer of skills between teachers in ideal position to model and demonstrate instructional strategies and materials with students. This desirable transfer of skills applies not only to the adaptive teaching strategies of the special educator, but also to the curriculum content knowledge and large group instructional techniques of the general educator. The result is intensified instruction which can be utilized to address such high priority student learning goals as minimum competency requirements.

The preference by special education students, parents and teacher for a less restrictive special education model in the form of co-operative teaching has been described in this study in terms of relative benefits to students and teachers involved in this service delivery model. Indeed, the benefits of improved student attitudes to school and learning, increased academic and social involvement in school, improved self esteem as well as an enhanced and intensified teaching environment resulting from a general educator and special educator sharing instructional responsibilities should be justification enough to continue the efforts to implement less restrictive special education alternatives in schools. However, specific advantages of co-teaching as a less restrictive model capable of truly enabling the general education classroom to accommodate more diverse and challenging students provides particular support for this model in light of recent concerns regarding successful mainstreaming.

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Table 1 - Student, Teacher, Parent Preference for Co-Taught Class Compared to Special Education Class - Attitudes Toward School.

Question		<u>Agreement</u>		<u>Disagreement</u>	
		n	%	n.	%
Enjoy going to school more in co-taught class	S	67	90.5	7	9.5
	T	12	92.3	1	7.7
	P	21	84.0	4	16.0
	Total	100	89.3	12	10.7
Happier in co-taught Class	S	64	83.1	13	16.9
	T	14	93.3	1	6.7
	P	17	70.8	7	29.2
	Total	95	81.9	21	18.1
Like school better in co-taught class	S	57	79.2	15	20.8
	T	11	91.7	1	8.3
	P	15	65.2	8	34.8
	Total	83	77.6	24	22.4

Table 2 Student, Teacher, Parent Preference for Co-Taught Class Compared to Special Education Class - Academic Involvement

Question		<u>Agreement</u>		<u>Disagreement</u>	
		n	%	n	%
Try harder in co-taught class	S	59	74.7	20	25.3
	T	13	72.2	5	27.8
	P	19	76.0	6	24.0
	Total	91	74.6	31	25.4
Learn more in co-taught class	S	66	81.5	15	18.5
	T	12	70.6	5	29.4
	P	14	63.6	8	36.4
	Total	92	76.7	28	23.3
More homework in co-taught class	S	45	64.3	25	35.7
	T	13	68.4	6	31.6
	P	12	60.0	8	40.0
	Total	70	64.2	39	35.8
More school work in co-taught class	S	52	73.2	19	26.8
	T	11	55.0	9	45.0
	P	12	60.0	8	40.0
	Total	75	67.6	36	32.4

Table 3 Student, Teacher, Parent Preference for Co-Taught Class Compared to Special Education Class - Social Outcomes

Question		<u>Agreement</u>		<u>Disagreement</u>	
		n	%	n	%
Feel better about self in co-taught class	S	70	85.4	12	14.6
	T	17	94.4	1	5.6
	P	17	73.9	6	26.1
	Total	104	84.6	19	15.4
More school friends	S	53	74.6	18	25.4
	T	8	88.9	1	11.1
	P	13	65.0	7	35.0
	Total	74	74.0	36	26.0

Table 4 Student, Teacher, Parent Preference for Co-Taught Class Compared to Special Education Class - Negative Effects

Question		<u>Agreement</u>		<u>Disagreement</u>	
		n	%	n	%
Less time to finish work in co-taught class	S	34	45	41	54.7
	T	11	64	6	35.3
	P	9	45	11	55.0
	Total	54	48.2	58	51.8
More afraid to ask questions in co-taught class	S	26	34.7	49	65.3
	T	2	11.1	16	88.9
	P	10	47.6	11	52.4
	Total	38	33.3	76	66.7
Get into more trouble in the co-taught class	S	19	31.1	42	68.9
	T	3	20.0	12	80.0
	P	11	44.0	14	56.0
	Total	33	32.7	68	67.3

Table 5 Advantages of Co-Teaching: Teacher Comments:

1. All of the students were better supervised. They all felt "special" having two teachers. Discipline was easier with two pair of eyes.
2. Creativity was enhanced by joint planning, an advantage to all students.
3. Provides academic and social opportunities for the special education student that they normally wouldn't receive.
4. There is always a teacher observing and monitoring students activities.
5. Opportunity for teachers to help a student is increased 100%.
6. Lesson plans are frequently better with two sets of ideas.
7. Special education students are receiving a better curriculum presentation.
8. Special education students feel better about themselves and are learning.
9. General education low achievers are benefiting from the attention. Behavior of all students has improved.
10. Students learned to work together in teams.
11. Raises the self-esteem of the special education student by allowing them to interact with more of their peers.
12. More individual attention is given to students.
13. Students work is graded and evaluated more quickly and effectively.
14. More grouping of students able to be done.
15. Can use a lot of strategies with two teachers.
16. Different teaching styles reach more students.

Table 6 Disadvantages of Co-Teaching: Teachers Comments:

1. Teachers who are going to be working together need the opportunity before beginning the semester to have planning time.
2. Teachers with different classroom and educational philosophies may clash.
3. Larger classes.
4. Deficiency in some skills and general knowledge or background in subject area for some students makes content very difficult.
5. Need more planning time.
6. The wide range of abilities made it difficult to keep all students involved at all times.
7. The special education teacher needs a periodic release day in order to complete testing, attend IEP meetings.
8. Some special education students receive less attention than they would have in special education classes.